# The ‘internationalisation’, or ‘Englishisation’, of higher education in East Asia

Higher Education
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00486-1

# The 'internationalisation', or 'Englishisation', of higher education in East Asia

Nicola Galloway[1] · Takuya Numajiri[2] · Nerys Rees[3]

Published online: 26 March 2020


**Abstract**
In recent years, one of the most significant trends in higher education in non-anglophone countries has been the growth in English Medium Instruction (EMI). However, provision is rapidly outpacing empirical research. This study examined how macro-level education policy with regard to EMI is both implemented and conceptualised at the institutional and classroom level in Chinese and Japanese universities. Utilising questionnaires with home students (n = 579) and staff (n = 28), interviews with home students (n = 29) and staff (n = 28) and four focus groups with staff and four with home students, in addition to questionnaires (n = 123), interviews (n = 10) and three focus groups with international students, the study provides insights into how EMI policy is operationalised, including types of programmes and language use, and how it is conceptualised by different stakeholders. The results highlight contextual constraints to policy implementation, calling for the need for more research into this growing trend and curriculum evaluation to inform context-sensitive ways to implement EMI policy. It also calls for a critical examination of monolingual EMI policies and academic norms amidst growing multilingualism in the EMI classroom as well as clear goals and objectives due to varying conceptualisations of the purposes of EMI amongst staff and students.

**Keywords** EMI · Internationalisation · Higher education · Attitudes · Language policy

✉ Nicola Galloway
Nicola.Galloway@ed.ac.uk

Takuya Numajiri
Taku.Numajiri@gmail.com

Nerys Rees
nrees@rikkyo.ac.jp

[1] Institute for Education, Teaching and Leadership, The Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh, Charteris Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, UK

[2] Institute for Education, Community and Society (IECS), The Moray House School of Education, The University of Edinburgh, St John's Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, UK

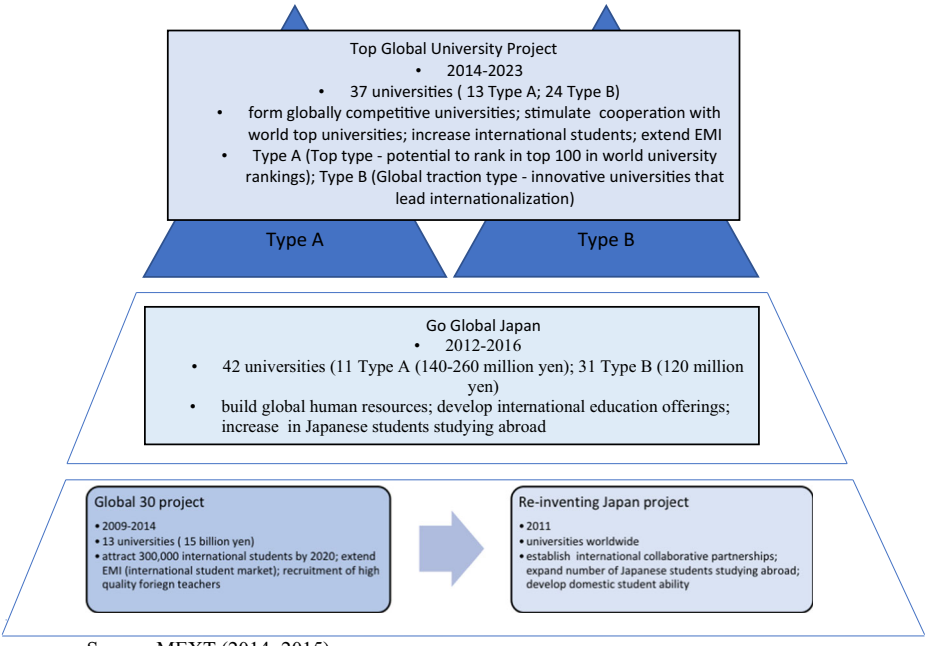
[3] Department of Global Business, College of Business, Rikkyo University, 3-34-1, Nishi Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 171-8501, Japan

## English medium instruction: a growing trend

As Higher Education Institutes (HEI) around the globe seek to internationalise, we have witnessed an unprecedented growth in the number of non-language subjects being taught in English. English Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach a non-language subject in a context where English is not the official language, and has become one of the most significant trends facing HEIs in such contexts today. Initial growth was in Europe, where much of the EMI research has been conducted. Wächter and Maiworm (2014) reported approximately 11 times more EMI programmes in 2014 than 2001 in Europe. However, EMI has become a global phenomenon, with growth in places like China and Japan. Government funding and university rankings are increasingly influenced by EMI provision, the ability to teach in English is becoming an important criterion in faculty hiring decisions, newly hired faculty are often required to teach at least some of their classes in English and many students are required to take at least some EMI classes to graduate.

In Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has introduced several highly funded policies related to the internationalisation of higher education, resulting in target numbers of international student recruitment and increased EMI provision (Fig. 1). While there was a 50% growth in universities offering EMI between 2003 and 2013 (MEXT 2015), only 13 universities achieved targets set by the 2009 Global 30 Project (Rose and McKinley 2018). Furthermore, in 2017, 188,384 international students were studying in Japan (JASSO 2017), which is significantly less than the initial target shown in Figure 1.

Similarly, in 2001, in a bid to strengthen university education, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) called for 5–10% of university courses to be taught in English (or another foreign language) at top-tier universities in 3 years. EMI provision was also factored into MoE




Source: MEXT (2014; 2015)

**Fig. 1** Internationalisation of higher education policies in Japan

evaluations of universities as a performance indicator; those providing at least 10% of all courses in English rated as 'excellent' (Hu et al. 2014). The policy was revised in 2007, increasing the percentage to 10% of undergraduate credits to be delivered in English (Beckett and Li 2012; Zhang 2017). Of the 135 HEIs across mainland China, 132 had provided EMI courses/programs by 2006, averaging 44 per institution (Wu et al. 2010, cited in Hu et al. 2014, p. 29). The number of joint programmes between Chinese universities and foreign universities has also grown.

Rapid growth in EMI provision is, however, outpacing empirical research. As a field of study, EMI is in a state of relative infancy, outside of Europe at least. Zhu and Yu's (2010), cited in Hu et al. 2014) review of 90 publications in China highlighted that, despite theoretical discussions or descriptions of EMI programmes existing, there remains a scarcity of research examining what is happening at the practical level and also the impact of EMI on both students' disciplinary and language learning. Research on how national policy goals regarding EMI provision are being operationalised at the institutional and classroom level, as well as the quality of provision and stakeholders' perceptions of this growing trend, is crucial. The study reported here responds to this need for an examination of how macro-level EMI policies are being implemented and conceptualised in Japan and China, two contexts experiencing rapid growth in provision.

## Perceived benefits of EMI

The phenomenal growth in EMI in higher education raises questions about why universities are transitioning from the students' home language to English, particularly since this brings many challenges. There are several reasons behind the drive towards EMI, although they differ according to context. In places like Japan, with a dwindling domestic enrolment amidst an ageing population, potential revenue from international student fees is attractive. Universities can also command higher fees from domestic students enrolled in EMI programmes. EMI also plays a crucial role in university rankings and eligibility for government funding. It is also often perceived to help institutions compete globally. In many HEIs, internationalisation has become synonymous with English. By definition, EMI has no language learning objective, making it different from content-based approaches to teaching languages, such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and CBI (Content-Based Instruction). However, in many contexts, particularly in East Asia, it is closely related to government goals of improving the English proficiency of its citizens.

Hu and Lei's (2014) case study in an EMI programme at a Chinese HEI found that faculty and students perceived EMI as having national (improved international perspective and connections), institutional (improved rankings) and personal (mastery of English, enhanced graduate social mobility and employability) benefits. In Europe, Wächter and Maiworm's (2014) survey revealed perceived benefits to include the following: improved international profile/awareness of the institution, strengthening of cooperation with foreign partner universities/institutions and improvement of assistance/guidance/advice for foreign students. For students, they include the following: improved mastery of English, closer interaction with teachers, increased mobility opportunities, good preparation for working in an international and intercultural environment, higher employability, better networking and improved quality of education. In Japan and China, Galloway et al. (2017) found perceived benefits for students to include the following: improved English proficiency, intercultural understanding and enhanced career opportunities for staff and students.

However, despite this link between EMI and goals to improve English proficiency, and the fact that it is a key motivating factor behind student enrolment in EMI programmes in Japan and China (Galloway et al. 2017), there remains little research measuring both the effectiveness of EMI in meeting these goals and the linguistic and academic support needed to help students study, and teachers teach, through the medium of English. The perceived benefits of EMI at the national, institutional and personal level cannot be guaranteed, and more research is needed to critically examine this rapidly growing trend in higher education.

## Attitudes towards EMI

Some studies have investigated staff and student attitudes. Some report positive attitudes (Aguilar and Rodríguez 2012; Ball and Lindsay 2013; Costa and Coleman 2013; Doiz et al. 2014; Galloway et al. 2017; Hu 2009; Jensen and Thogersen 2011), but others report faculty/student resistance to EMI (e.g., Doiz et al. 2013, 2014; Tange 2012). The attitudes of key stakeholders also differ (Galloway et al. 2017; Doiz et al. 2014), which is problematic for successful and sustainable policy implementation. In Galloway et al. (2017), Japanese and Chinese students perceived EMI as a means to improve their English proficiency, but faculty saw it as an instructional approach to deliver content. Such differences influenced attitudes towards language policy; faculty believed using the students' mother tongue helps explain difficult concepts, while students view it as a sign of an instructor's limited English competence.

## EMI policy implementation and challenges

In addition to the need for clear programme goals, it is naïve to assume that merely teaching content through the medium of English will improve students' proficiency in the language. Hu et al. (2014) found similar proficiency gains on two different proficiency tests amongst EMI students and those studying in Chinese while taking typical general English language classes. Some studies do show positive proficiency gains, but there is a lack of evidence demonstrating a positive correlation between EMI and English proficiency and if 'language proficiency gains in EMI are a clear policy goal, then such programmes need to be accompanied by language classes' (Rose and Galloway 2019, p. 218).

The need for support is even more apparent when considering language-related challenges in EMI studies, which are often related to English proficiency and are often linked to resistance to EMI (Aizawa and Rose 2019; Doiz et al. 2013, 2014; Tange 2012; Wächter and Maiworm 2014). In Europe, English proficiency was one of the reasons HEIs chose not to offer EMI courses (Wächter and Maiworm 2014). In Japan, Aizawa and Rose (2019) also found it to be a major deterrent for students. English proficiency has been reported to be a significant factor in determining the success of an EMI programme (Ball and Lindsay 2013; Beckett and Li 2012; Doiz et al. 2014; Llurda 2013; Wilkinson 2013) and students' English proficiency has been related to a number of issues in the EMI classroom (Airey 2011; Airey and Linder 2006; Beckett and Li 2012; Chapple 2015; Hellekjaer 2010; Tsuneyoshi 2005). These include problems understanding lessons and lectures, communicating disciplinary content, asking/answering fewer questions, taking longer to complete the course and an increased chance of dropping out. An oft-cited 'issue' related to a lack of English proficiency is also often noted to be mother tongue usage, although this, of course, relates to how we define both

English 'proficiency' and also EMI itself. Research on multilingualism in higher education (see, e.g., Earls 2016) and translanguaging in EMI (see, e.g., Mazak & Carroll 2017) and studies that question the 'E' in EMI (Rose and Galloway 2019) bring monolingual language policies into question. The continued use of tests such as IELTS, TOEFL and TOEIC, as both placement and proficiency tests in EMI programmes, are problematic given that they are based on 'native' English norms and language-related challenges as well as how to define 'proficiency' for EMI settings are in need of further investigation.

The EMI classroom is not only multilingual in many contexts, but students often have varying levels of English proficiency. In Europe, language support varies (Wächter and Maiworm 2014). In Japan, Burgess et al. (2010) reported that EMI classes are often too difficult for Japanese students. Similarly, Chapple (2015) found that faculty adjusted content for Japanese student when teaching in English and Japanese students also found EMI more difficult than expected and felt disadvantaged if a western approach was adopted in class. The majority of Chinese students in Beckett and Li's (2012) study also complained about 'the shallowness of content taught in English' (p. 55). Language-related challenges were also reported in Hu et al. (2014) where it was reported that despite the existence of language support structures, both students and faculty reported having insufficient English proficiency. In this study, students also wanted classes tailored to the Chinese context and found it challenging to discuss their subject in English and asked instructors to codeswitch, use Chinese materials, and translate content. The faculty also reported simplifying the content when teaching in English. Hu and Lei (2014), also in the Chinese context, revealed that faculty code switched to explain difficult concepts and students' English proficiency was reported to be inadequate, with most students interviewed agreeing. Students misunderstood disciplinary content, borrowed Chinese textbooks from those taking the Chinese medium course and some audited these classes. They also felt that EMI was a mere marketing tool to attract students, reporting a mismatch between what the programme promised and what it could achieve in reality. In Japan, Aizawa and Rose (2019) found students' English proficiency was heavily coded in the interview data and Galloway et al.'s (2017) comparative study of EMI provision in Japan and China found language to be the main challenge. This study also highlighted a lack of collaboration between instructors providing linguistic and academic support English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instructors and those delivering content in English.

Language-related challenges also relate to the possible detrimental effect English has on national languages and possible westernisation. In Japan, Tsuneyoshi (2005) found that 'Internationalisation' (most notably Americanisation) has resulted in conventional Japanese-style courses being pressured into meeting so-called international standards. Japanese students also reported that American-type lectures did not fit their needs. Jon and Kim's (2011) comparative study of HEIs in Japan and Korea, which lacks empirical data from Japan, found that Korean students were positive overall and were satisfied with their EMI courses. Stakeholders in both countries were, however, critical of EMI strategies, expressing concerns over domestic students' struggles with English, their ability to understand the subject matter and western styles of instruction in EMI classes. Students also expressed concerns over the impact on the Korean language. Faculty in both countries also 'faced cultural dilemmas' (ibid, p. 166) using English. Language-related concerns clearly relate to both proficiency in English and the impact on national languages. Studies also reveal concerns over the westernisation of education systems. In fact, HEIs in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have adopted measures to protect the Nordic languages in academia, due to the growing presence of English (Nordic Council of Ministers 2007, cited in Doiz et al. 2014).

Further challenges relate to management, administration and resources. These include availability of qualified teachers who can teach in English. Well-designed staff training has also been reported to be instrumental in determining the success of an EMI programme (Ball and Lindsay 2013; Wilkinson 2013). EMI clearly has many perceived benefits, but there are also clearly many challenges to successful and sustainable macro-level EMI policy implementation at the meso- and micro-level. Successful EMI policy implementation requires careful planning with key stakeholders to avoid unrealistic expectations and disappointment.

## The study

Our study responds to this need for research in East Asia, where there is a danger of EMI becoming an easy answer to improving English proficiency and a top-down internationalisation policy lacking becoming an understanding of the local context. To examine how EMI is being approached and conceptualised by students and faculty in Japan and China, we formulated two broad research questions:

1. How is EMI approached?
2. How do staff and students view EMI?

## The setting

China and Japan represent two contexts where EMI provision is on the rise, linked to governmental drives to retain more talented global human resources with English proficiency. In China, universities have moved from offering Chinese–English bilingual experiences in more affluent parts of the country, to implementing EMI across the country. Japan has seen a move from short-term EMI programmes for short-term visitors in private and then national universities to expanding EMI provision at all levels. Initially, this was a response to pressure to recruit international students and meet requests from universities abroad for partner programmes. EMI then became the focus of the internationalisation agenda and a string of highly funded government policies followed (Fig. 1) to encourage expansion.

## Data collection

The study builds on Galloway et al. (2017) that involved home students and faculty. Here, we report on questionnaires with home (n = 579) and international (n = 123) students and faculty (n = 28), interviews with home (n = 29) and international (n = 10) students and faculty (n = 28) and focus groups with home (n = 4) and international (n = 3) students and faculty (n = 4) (see Table 1). Fifteen universities participated in total and 9 participated in the qualitative data collection. All universities in Japan were private apart from University A, three were type B universities (Fig. 1) and all of those in China were public. All had varying approaches to EMI; some requiring international English language proficiency tests (IELTS, TOEFL and TOEIC), national tests or the university's own entrance examination. Instruments were piloted in Japan by one of the authors (Galloway), who collected the data in person. Ethics forms, questionnaires and interview and focus group prompts were sent to programme administrators in advance.

**Table 1** Overview of participants

| | Questionnaire | | Interview | | Focus group | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Students (*N* = *702*) | Staff (*N* = *28*) | Students (*N* = *39*) | Staff (*N* = *28*) | Students (*N* = *7*) | Staff (*N* = *4*) |
| Japan | | | | | | |
| University A | 102 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 1 (*n*=6) | 0 |
| University B | 21 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| University C | 161 | 1 | 10 | 4 | 1 (*n*=5) | 0 |
| University D | 82 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 1 (*n*=5) | 1 (*n*=3) |
| University E | 81 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| University F | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| University G | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Working with several universities | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Missing | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| China | | | | | | |
| University H | 61 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 (*n*=5) | 1 (*n*=4) |
| University I | 45 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| University J | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| University K | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| University L | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| University M | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 (*n*=8) | 1 (*n=4*) |
| University N | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| University O | 124 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 2 (*n*=5; *n=6*) | 1 (*n=5*) |

## Analysing the data

Quantitative data analysis was conducted via SPSS 24 and qualitative analysis via NVivo 11, where data sets were analysed separately before cross-case comparison. Focus group analysis extended beyond initial thematic analysis to examine the dynamics of the interactions.

## Limitations

Limitations include the small sample of international students in China, preventing a comparison with Japan. Furthermore, with only 28 faculty members, the findings provide preliminary insights. While the students are studying a range of subjects, faculty were predominantly from majors related to international and global studies. China is also a large country where the economy and approach to internationalisation varies according to region. As such, our study provides preliminary insights into select areas within this large country.

## Findings

### Participant overview

Out of the 454 respondents studying in Japan, 352 (78%) were home, and 102 (22%) were international students. In China, almost all (n = 248) were home students, with only five international students (Madagascar). The majority were female (67% in Japan and 60% in China), and nearly half in Japan were aged 18 or 19 years old, compared to 22% in China. Only 12 in Japan

and 1 in China were older than 30 years old. Nearly half in Japan were studying international and global studies, 25% of those in China were majoring in English-related subjects and 25% in economics-related subjects. 27% in Japan and 20% in China were first-year undergraduate students, one-third in both Japan and China were in their second year, and 26% in Japan and 44% in China were third-year students. The remaining 15% in Japan and 4% in China were either fourth-year or postgraduate students. Most of the first- and some second-year students in both Japan and China had not decided on their major.

Almost all international students had prior experience studying abroad, most of the Chinese home students (82%) had no experience and more than 80% of the Japanese domestic students had some.

Fifteen male and 13 female faculty members participated (eight from Japan, six from China, five from the USA, four from the UK, two from New Zealand, one from Australia, one had dual nationality (China and US) and one missing). Six out of the eight working in China were Chinese and eight out of the 20 in Japan were Japanese. Just over half (15) were 40 to 50 years old, seven were aged 31 to 40, three were aged 51 to 60 and the remaining three were aged 20 to 30 years old. More than half were teaching English majors, with the others teaching various subjects, such as education, history, psychology and media and communication studies. Almost all were teaching undergraduate students, although 13 were teaching at the postgraduate level. 22 had been teaching the subject for three or more years and 27 had work experience abroad.

29 interviewees were home students and 10 were international students, coming from the UK (n=1), the US (n=3), Taiwan (n=1), China (n=2), Singapore (n=1), the Philippines (n=1) and Lithuania (n=1). 10 of the 28 teachers interviewed were teaching EAP and 18 were teaching subjects through the medium of English (content teachers). Focus groups consisted of home and international students (Switzerland (n=1), Latvia (n=1), Taiwan (n=1), Spain (n=1), China (n=2), Canada (n=1) and the United States of America (n=1)) and 3 teacher focus groups were conducted with EAP teachers and 1 with content teachers.

## Approaches to EMI

More than 90% of students in Japan stated that their lectures, course materials, classes and exams were always, or very often, in English, compared to only half in China. On the other hand, almost all faculty reported majority English usage (Table 2). All questions were positively skewed and,

**Table 2** Faculty perceptions of English use by country

| Description | Label | Japan N | China N |
|---|---|---|---|
| My lectures are in English | Never | 1 | 0 |
| | Very often | 2 | 1 |
| | Always | 13 | 6 |
| My course materials are in English | Never | 1 | 0 |
| | Very often | 2 | 2 |
| | Always | 13 | 5 |
| My classes are in English | Never | 1 | 0 |
| | Very often | 2 | 1 |
| | Always | 13 | 6 |
| My exams are in English | Never | 1 | 0 |
| | Very often | 1 | 1 |
| | Always | 14 | 6 |

therefore, a Mann–Whitney U test was applied to examine the student data set. This revealed a significant difference in attitudes towards the sole use of English in lectures and classes (M = 2.94 versus M = 2.73, U = 24,592, p = 0.000, ES = 0.29), with those in China reporting less frequent use.

## Attitudes towards EMI

### Students

On a 4-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 'Strongly disagree' to 4 'Strongly agree'), students displayed higher levels of agreement that only English should be used in EMI lectures and classes (M = 2.80, SD = 0.77) compared to a multilingual approach (M = 2.72, SD = 0.75). They felt there are enough qualified teachers to teach subjects through English (M = 2.88, SD = 0.74) and regarding the appropriateness of EMI, significantly higher scores (M = 3.23, SD = 0.59) were reported for university-level compared to primary (M = 2.73, SD = 0.76) and secondary education (M = 2.90, SD = 0.70). Students strongly believed that EMI programmes improve their overall English language proficiency (M = 3.26, SD = 0.57) and their knowledge of the subject (M = 2.98, SD = 0.60). A Mann–Whitney U test revealed significant differences between the students, with those in Japan displaying higher levels of agreement regarding availability of qualified teachers (M = 2.94 versus M = 2.73, U = 24,024, p = 0.003) and that EMI improves students' English language proficiency (M = 3.33 versus M = 3.11, U = 21,520, p = 0.000) (Table 3).

Given the small number of international students in China (n = 5), the attitudes of the Japanese home, 'non-native' English speaking (NNES) (excluding Japanese) and 'native' English speaking (NES) students in Japan were compared (Table 4) using a Kruskal–Wallis analysis of variance test. Significant differences were found and a Mann–Whitney U test determined pairwise differences between the groups, finding a significant difference in beliefs regarding the use of English in lectures and classes ($\chi^2 = 8.869$, p = 0.012). NNES international students were more likely to believe that English only should be used (M = 3.20) than the home (M = 2.93) and NES students (M = 2.79). Regarding the use of their mother tongue

**Table 3** Comparison of attitudes towards EMI between students in Japan and China

| | Country | Mean | U | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I believe that EMI programmes should only permit the use of English in lectures and classes. | Japan | 2.94 | 24,592 | 0.000 |
| | China | 2.48 | | |
| I believe that EMI programmes should permit staff and students to use English and their mother tongue language. | Japan | 2.71 | 34,976.5 | 0.320 |
| | China | 2.76 | | |
| There are enough qualified teachers in my context to teach subjects through English. | Japan | 2.94 | 24,024 | 0.003 |
| | China | 2.73 | | |
| Appropriateness of EMI for teaching content subjects | | | | |
| University (undergraduate) | Japan | 3.26 | 24,114.5 | 0.088 |
| | China | 3.15 | | |
| University (masters) | Japan | 3.20 | 25,352 | 0.482 |
| | China | 3.23 | | |
| University (doctoral) | Japan | 3.15 | 24,014 | 0.091 |
| | China | 3.25 | | |
| EMI programmes improve students' overall English language proficiency. | Japan | 3.33 | 21,520 | 0.000 |
| | China | 3.11 | | |
| EMI programmes improve students' overall knowledge of the subject being studied. | Japan | 2.97 | 25,935 | 0.797 |
| | China | 2.99 | | |

**Table 4** Comparison of attitudes towards EMI between home, NNES and NES students in Japan

| Description | Group | Mean | SD | Chi-square | p | Mann–Whitney post hoc test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I believe that EMI programmes should only permit the use of English in lectures and classes. | Japan | 2.93 | 0.72 | 8.869 | 0.012 | NNES > Japanese |
| | NNES | 3.20 | 0.77 | | | NNES > NES |
| | NES | 2.79 | 0.69 | | | |
| I believe that EMI programmes should permit staff and students to use English and their mother tongue language. | Japan | 2.75 | 0.72 | 9.755 | 0.008 | Japanese > NNES |
| | NNES | 2.39 | 0.81 | | | NNES < NES |
| | NES | 2.81 | 0.71 | | | |
| There are enough qualified teachers in my context to teach subjects through English. | Japan | 2.94 | 0.74 | 4.329 | 0.115 | |
| | NNES | 2.81 | 0.76 | | | |
| | NES | 3.16 | 0.68 | | | |
| Appropriateness of EMI | | | | | | |
| University (undergraduate) | Japan | 3.23 | 0.58 | 4.729 | 0.094 | |
| | NNES | 3.38 | 0.54 | | | |
| | NES | 3.40 | 0.55 | | | |
| University (masters) | Japan | 3.17 | 0.66 | 5.075 | 0.079 | |
| | NNES | 3.29 | 0.64 | | | |
| | NES | 3.40 | 0.55 | | | |
| University (doctoral) | Japan | 3.12 | 0.71 | 5.910 | 0.052 | |
| | NNES | 3.21 | 0.75 | | | |
| | NES | 3.40 | 0.59 | | | |
| EMI programmes improve students' overall English language proficiency. | Japan | 3.27 | 0.55 | 17.919 | 0.000 | Japanese < NNES |
| | NNES | 3.62 | 0.54 | | | |
| | NES | 3.45 | 0.50 | | | |
| EMI programmes improve students' overall knowledge of the subject being studied. | Japan | 2.99 | 0.58 | 0.398 | 0.820 | |
| | NNES | 2.90 | 0.76 | | | |
| | NES | 2.98 | 0.66 | | | |

($\chi^2 = 9.755$, $p = 0.008$), NNES international students were more likely to believe that this was not appropriate ($M = 2.39$) than the home ($M = 2.75$) and NES students ($M = 2.81$). Attitudes towards the role of EMI programmes in improving students' overall English language proficiency also differed significantly ($\chi^2 = 17.919$, $p = 0.000$), with Japanese home students being more negative ($M = 3.27$) than NNES students ($M = 3.62$).

### Faculty perceptions of EMI programmes

There was broad agreement amongst faculty that EMI programmes should only permit the use of English (14 agreed, and five strongly agreed), but 14 also felt that a multilingual approach should be permitted. They also believed there are sufficient numbers of qualified teachers to teach subjects through English (seven agreed, and nine strongly agreed), all believed that EMI is appropriate at the university level and all except one agreed or strongly agreed that EMI programmes improve students' overall English language proficiency and their knowledge of the subject.

## Open-ended data

### Approaches to EMI

Seventy-five students noted that the programme they study on includes a collection of EMI classes and 417 were studying on a full-degree programme, although some of these offered

classes in the students' mother tongues and others noted that only the materials are in English. Faculty referred to teaching on a 'full-degree program in English', programmes that offer 'a collection of classes', those that have preparatory programmes and those that offer a 'staggered' approach to EMI. Various approaches to English and academic support were offered and many students referred to a dual language approach (English and their mother tongue).

### Attitudes towards EMI

A total of 203 students commented on the potential for EMI programmes to improve [students'] English proficiency and only 10 were negative. English skills were reported to improve from the 'high-quality lectures', although for some, 'this depends on the program and professor'. Most reported that 'students in my university did improve their English proficiency', viewing EMI 'as an environment that constantly pushes students to develop English language skills'. This was seen to be important in places like Japan and China, where 'there are not many opportunities to use English'. Seventeen home students in Japan and four in China referred to their own personal English improvement in comparison to only one international student. Twelve instructors felt that it 'depends'. One instructor was positive about their own institution (University A), but sceptical as to whether this was the case elsewhere: 'there are EMI programs that are not worthy of the name. EMI is being used as a marketing tool'. Another did not 'think a program can do this. The students have to want it' and 'without support (scaffolding, or team-teaching with language teachers), I doubt they will do much to help accuracy in English').

A total of 209 students commented on the potential of EMI programmes to improve students' content knowledge. Fifty-five were negative, mostly referring to English proficiency and subject coverage. Many would find it easier in their mother tongue, yet they were aware of the necessity of English to access specialised knowledge and also for their future. Twelve instructors felt that it is 'possible' but depends on English proficiency and the instructor. Many noted that EMI provides access to specialised knowledge, but that some subjects may be unsuitable to teach in English.

Perceived personal benefits of EMI emerged in responses regarding why students enrolled. A total of 535 students and 26 instructors commented. A total of 194 students, compared to only 2 instructors referred to improved English proficiency, with more than twice as many home than international students commenting. Enhanced employability was mentioned by students ('Because I want to pursue my future career, I thought it necessary to be able to learn the contents in English sufficiently') and faculty ('Because of the success at getting a job') and both referred to enhanced mobility (EMI provides 'the opportunity for students to do the one-year study-abroad programme'). Other benefits included preparation to participate in a globalised world (35), enhanced quality of education (2), intercultural communication and understanding (1), access to specialised knowledge (1) and improve university rankings (1).

## Interviews

### Approaches to EMI

Most courses/programmes were reported to be predominantly in English, using the students' mother tongue 'occasionally' (Claire, EAP instructor, University A). University policies regarding language use were 'invisible' (Chenxin, EAP instructor, University O) or 'vague' causing some instructors to face 'dilemmas' (Hiromi, Content, University A) regarding what is

**Table 5** Benefits of EMI

| Benefit | Faculty (N = 28) | Home students (N = 29) | International students (N = 10) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal | | | | |
| Enhance employability | 8 | 9 | 1 | 18 |
| Improve English proficiency | 4 | 5 | 2 | 11 |
| Prepare to participate in a globalised world | 3 | 4 | 2 | 9 |
| Enhance mobility | 2 | 6 | – | 8 |
| Access specialised knowledge | 2 | 3 | – | 5 |
| Participate in international conferences | 1 | 1 | – | 2 |
| Publish in academic journals | 1 | 2 | – | 3 |
| Gain knowledge of western culture | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| National | | | | |
| Compete globally | 5 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Institutional | | | | |
| Attract international students | 3 | – | 1 | 4 |
| Improve university ranking | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |

acceptable. Sarah (EAP instructor, University H), wondered whether her occasional use of the students' mother tongue meant that '[her] class is not really EMI'. Attitudes differed over language policy; most instructors valued the use of the students' home language to scaffold learning, yet students saw this as a sign of their instructors' limited English competence and were critical of instructors who allow this for not being 'strict' and for 'neglecting the class' (Takemasa, University C student).

## Attitudes towards EMI

Staff and students both saw many perceived benefits of EMI (Table 5). Personal benefits were mentioned more by home students and by those in China. Institutional benefits were mentioned more by instructors than students.

Despite the perceived benefits, both groups felt that EMI is 'both good and bad' (Ayako, University C student) and identified a number of challenges (Table 6).

Students discussed language-related challenges the most, referring to both faculty and students' perceived limited English proficiency and the use of other languages. These were mentioned by almost all international students compared to nearly half of home students. However, nearly all home students referred to their own issues, yet no international students commented on their own language issues. Around half of the students' concerns related to their teachers' English skills:

> If [the teachers'] English is poor, they try their best, but maybe they cannot help us because their English is poor too (…).
>
> Li, University H student

Faculty raised concerns about students' English proficiency:

> They [the students] have had an academic English course, you know they have had years of writing English and yet, I worry about their skills.

**Table 6** Staff and students' perceptions of the challenges of EMI

| Challenge | Home students | International students | Faculty | Total | China | Japan |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Language-related | 17 | 9 | 15 | 41 | 10 | 31 |
| Institutional/organisational | | | | | | |
| Support-related | 13 | 2 | 8 | 36 | 10 | 13 |
| Collaboration-related | 1 | – | 13 | 23 | 3 | 11 |
| Nationality/culture | 7 | 7 | 8 | 22 | 0 | 22 |
| Materials | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 6 |

Prof. Ichikawa, EAP instructor, University D

The majority of students commenting on support-related challenges (availability, duration and relevance) were home students. Most EAP courses were offered only for the first few semesters and were criticised for not being related to their needs (they 'just tells us how to make conversation in daily life, but it does not help with [their] major' (Qiaoyang, University O student)). They were critical of the lack of support and only two universities provided tailor-made EAP classes, and it was here that students were most positive.

Both staff and students discussed nationality/culture-related challenges, raising concerns related to the internationalised EMI classroom. Students felt teachers 'should understand the characteristics of [local] students' (Yuka, University A student) better. On the other hand, some teachers commented that 'the toughest part [is] getting [the students] to think in a western logical fashion' (Prof. Kanbe, EAP instructor, University D), rather than them adjusting to students' expectations. Home students commented more on the need to accommodate the local educational culture, while international students raised concerns about home students' backgrounds. Materials-related challenges included criticism of the textbooks in EMI programmes for being 'not for Japanese people' (Hiromi, Content Instructor, University A) and for having extensive complicated technical terms in English.

## Focus groups

7 student focus groups (3 in Japan and 4 in China), 3 of which included home and international students, and 4 staff focus groups (3 in China and 1 in Japan) were conducted. In University K, participants were content instructors, while in the others, they taught EAP.

### Approaches to EMI

Discussions on languages used in the classroom dominated the data, although not as extensively as challenges to EMI (Table 7). The focus groups revealed that English is used mostly, yet unlike the interviews, some students discussed their teachers' use of their mother tongue in a positive light. It was noted to be a useful way to support them as it is necessary 'to learn the tough things from your own language'. In University O, a Chinese home student felt that her Chinese instructor did this because she 'cannot speak English fluently'. Two others initially agreed but the group then established an opposing view, turning to discuss the benefits of mother tongue use. Overall, however, opinions varied and three groups remained critical and

**Table 7** Focus group thematic framework

| Theme | References | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Student focus group (university) | | | | | | | | Staff focus group (university) | | | | |
| | Total | A | H | C | M | O | O | D | Total | H | M | O | D |
| Languages used in the classroom | 73 | 7 | 11 | 5 | 9 | 18 | 19 | 4 | 31 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 10 |
| Perceived benefits | 42 | | | | | | | | 19 | | | | |
| Personal | 33 | | | | | | | | 11 | | | | |
| Access to specialised knowledge | 10 | 1 | 1 | – | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | – | 1 |
| Preparation to participate in a globalised world | 8 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | – | 0 | – | – | – | – |
| Enhanced employability | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | – | 2 | – | 2 | – | – | 1 | 1 |
| Intercultural understanding | 5 | – | 2 | 1 | 2 | – | – | – | 2 | 1 | – | 1 | – |
| Enhanced mobility | 2 | – | 2 | – | – | – | – | – | 2 | 2 | – | – | – |
| Improved English proficiency (students) | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | 1 | – | 1 | – | – |
| Improved English proficiency (teachers) | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | 1 | – | 1 | – | – |
| Institutional | 9 | | | | | | | | 8 | | | | |
| Attract international students | 3 | – | 1 | – | 2 | – | – | – | 3 | 1 | – | 1 | 1 |
| Improve university rankings | 3 | – | – | – | 2 | – | 1 | – | 4 | 1 | – | 1 | 2 |
| National | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Compete globally | 3 | – | – | – | 2 | – | 1 | – | 1 | – | – | 1 | – |
| Challenges of implementing EMI | 83 | | | | | | | | 61 | | | | |
| Language-related challenges | 45 | 4 | 14 | 5 | 6 | 11 | 5 | – | 37 | 3 | 14 | 14 | 6 |
| Institutional/organisational | 23 | | | | | | | | 24 | | | | |
| Collaboration | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | 16 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 5 |
| Support for content staff | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | 8 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Support for students | 23 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 3 | 2 | – | – | 0 | – | – | – | – |
| Nationality/culture | 15 | 5 | 3 | – | 4 | – | – | 3 | 0 | – | – | – | – |

were ‘very interested in being trained by all English’. Some students changed their minds in the discussions. In University A, Tomoko (Japanese, home student) changed her mind after being questioned by Noah (Swiss International student) about whether she prefers a Japanese or a ‘native’ English speaking teacher, questioning herself as to whether ‘it’s a good thing or a bad thing’, although ultimately preferring the latter due to a preference for English only.

Faculty discussions revealed that ‘it’s just taken for granted’ that ‘all is mostly in English’ (Zhaohui, Content instructor, University M), although, as in the interviews, occasional use is seen as necessary to clarify difficult content due to students’ low English proficiency: ‘if I say something in English and I see that some students are struggling, I will say it in Chinese, and that can be helpful’ (John, Content Instructor, University M).

## Attitudes towards EMI

As in the interviews, both groups perceived many benefits of EMI. Access to specialised knowledge was most frequently discussed, followed by enhanced mobility and enhanced employability. The same benefits were discussed, except for the potential to improve students’ and teachers’ English proficiency. However, once again, the challenges to implementing EMI dominated and discussions on other topics also led to this. In University C, for example, when prompted to discuss the reasons behind EMI growth, Noriko (Japanese home student) noted that it might be ‘hard’ to learn content in English, leading to a lengthy discussion on challenges.

Language-related challenges dominated in both groups, mostly relating to perceived limited English competence and language use policy. It was only in University D that this was not discussed, where discussions were led by two native English speakers positioned as experts. Such challenges were linked to support-related challenges, although these were not discussed by teachers. Students were concerned whether their content teachers could help with their language-related challenges, and many discussions returned to this topic. In University C, Chunhua (Chinese international student) prompted a discussion on language use, but Mateo (Spanish international student) shifted the focus to language- and support-related challenges, noting that he 'wants to learn English, but the professors' English is not so good'. Noriko (Japanese home student) continued the discussion, raising problems understanding some professors with 'a minimum ability of speaking English'. Faculty also discussed content teachers' perceived lack of English proficiency. In University M, Lee (Content Instructor) referred to 'professors who have the expert knowledge in their major' but 'may not be so good in English'. Peijing (EAP instructor) then positioned herself, and the other EAP instructors, as proficient in English, but lacking subject knowledge ('us, who can speak English well, we cannot teach their major', which many groups also felt created a dilemma for EMI. Support for content teachers was discussed in the staff groups and the general feeling was that 'they need substantial training in language skills' (Anna, EAP Instructor, University H), and collaboration-related challenges related to the need for dialogue and collaboration between content and EAP instructors.

Nationality/culture-related challenges were mentioned in all student focus groups, but not discussed by faculty. In University D, the two native speakers argued that the teachers 'should have a high cultural competency [and] know [their] audience a little bit' (Elliot) British international student) better. Those in University H and M discussed the importance of the students cultivating their own cultural background ('it is very necessary for us to learn our own traditional culture well'—Kara, EAP Instructor, University H). Students in University A briefly discussed cultural differences between the home and international students ('we show respect by being quiet for the teacher, we take notes and listen, but the international students respond to the professor' (Edgar, Latvian International student, University A).

## Discussion

Given the policy-practice gap identified in the literature, as well as the need for more research in expanding EMI contexts such as Japan and China, this study aimed to gain an understanding of how EMI is implemented and also conceptualised by staff and students. The results raise critical questions about EMI policy implementation, showcasing how macro-level policy is both implemented and interpreted in different ways by different stakeholders.

### Approaches to EMI

There are differences in classroom practice regarding language use (Aizawa and Rose 2019). Students in Japan were more likely to be exposed to English, with only half of those in China reporting that their EMI lectures and classes were conducted in English, although almost all faculty in both countries reported that this was the case (Chapple 2015). Students in Japan, particularly those from non-native' English speaking countries, also felt more strongly that EMI means 'English Only'. On the other hand, Japanese and NES students tended to agree about the use of mother tongue languages in the EMI classrooms. Qualitative data highlighted concerns amongst faculty about the

lack of clear-cut policies. The uncertainty surrounding EMI language policy resulted in different interpretations (Hasim and Barnard 2018). The predominant medium of instruction is English, yet most believe that a multilingual approach is acceptable and necessary (Galloway et al. 2017). The use of the students' mother tongue was seen to be necessary to deliver content (Hu and Lei 2014) and comments reflected concerns regarding the detrimental effects students' low English proficiency can have on content mastery (Airey 2011; Beckett and Li 2012; Chapple 2015; Hellekjaer 2010; Tsuneyoshi 2005). This not only raises questions surrounding the effectiveness of monolingual EMI policies, but students' concerns surrounding their instructors' use of their mother tongue, seen to be a sign of their limited English competence and for not being 'strict', also raises questions regarding both the purpose of EMI and their beliefs that an English-only approach is beneficial for their language learning goals. In the focus groups, there was an initial favourable orientation towards a multilingual approach. Overall, however, they were critical of this and 'very interested in being trained by all English'.

Clear guidelines on both the aims and the learning outcomes of EMI programmes are essential and the much-needed faculty training should also focus on language policy to highlight that EMI does not have to be a monolingual endeavour. A dual approach is popular in Europe and, while this may be at odds with government English-only approaches, it is hoped that the flourishing research on language use in the EMI classroom will showcase the valuable use of translanguaging. The international university classroom is a multilingual one, and we need norms and academic practices that better reflect this.

In addition to revealing insights into both language use, and attitudes towards this, the study also shows that different models of EMI operate in Japan and China. Despite the importance of English proficiency in determining the success of an EMI programmes (Ball and Lindsay 2013; Beckett and Li 2012), our study reveals the variable nature of support. Overall, students were critical of limited availability and the general nature of EAP classes, and only two universities in the study provided tailor-made EAP classes. Criticism of textbooks that are 'not for Japanese people' reflects the findings of Nguyen et al. (2017), who found in their Vietnamese case study that materials often had little application to the local context, noted to be a concern for students preparing to work in Vietnam.

## Attitudes towards EMI

Both students and staff in both countries had positive attitudes towards EMI (Aguilar and Rodríguez 2012; Ball and Lindsay 2013; Costa and Coleman 2013; Hu 2009; Jon and Kim 2011; Jensen and Thogersen 2011; Pecorari et al. 2011). Unlike in Hu and Lei (2014), almost all believed that EMI programmes improve not only students' overall English language proficiency (Galloway et al. 2017), but also their overall knowledge of the subject. International students in Japan were significantly more likely to believe this, and Japanese home students were more negative than NNES students. Those in Japan strongly believed that EMI programmes improve students' overall English language proficiency, but no significant difference was found between the students regarding the benefit of EMI programmes on gaining overall knowledge of the subject.

Both staff and students recognised several benefits of EMI (Fig. 2). Personal benefits (Hu and Lei 2014; Wächter and Maiworm 2014; Galloway et al. 2017) included enhanced employability (Galloway et al. 2017; Hu and Lei 2014b; Wächter and Maiworm 2014), improved English proficiency (Hu and Lei 2014; Wächter and Maiworm 2014; Galloway et al. 2017), preparation to participate in a globalised world, enhanced mobility (Wächter and Maiworm 2014), access to specialised knowledge (Galloway et al. 2017), participation in international conferences, publishing

in academic journals and knowledge of western culture. Further benefits emerging in the focus groups included intercultural understanding and communication (Galloway et al. 2017) and improved English proficiency for faculty. Home students commented more on the personal benefits of EMI, although those in the Chinese universities commented more on the benefits than those in Japan. Institutional and national benefits (Hu and Lei 2014) were discussed by both groups and included attracting international students and improving university rankings (Hu et al. 2014, Wächter and Maiworm 2014) to help both the university and the country compete globally.

Overall, both groups felt that EMI is 'both good and bad' (Ayako, home student, University F). A number of challenges were identified (Fig. 2) and all focus groups directed discussions towards these challenges. Language-related challenges were of most concern (Doiz et al. 2013; Galloway et al. 2017), particularly for international students, yet differences emerged. Staff focused exclusively on the students' limited English competency, yet students referred to both their own and their teachers' language-related challenges. Home students referred to their own problems with the English language (Doiz et al. 2013), while international students focused exclusively on issues with other students' and their instructors. Nationality/culture-related challenges related to the different lingua-cultural backgrounds of domestic and international students and different approaches to different approaches to university education. Kanbe's (University D) comment that it is "tough" to get students to think in a western logical fashion implies that EMI requires a western approach rather than adjusting to the students' norms/backgrounds.

English is central to the internationalisation agenda in both countries. In China, EMI provision is part of a Ministry of Education Plan (National Plan for Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development), which aims to attract up to 35.5 million international students by 2020 (Perrin 2017). Yet, while internationalisation may be a priority for universities around the globe, we should be wary of promoting both a Westernised and also a monolingual approach to EMI. In addition to further research, clear policies are required at the institutional level to avoid individual instructors having to navigate these 'dilemmas', particularly when content instructors are not trained in providing language support or are unfamiliar with teaching an international cohort. This study raises concerns about the need for linguistic support for content teachers as well as the lack of collaboration between EAP and content teachers. Attitudes towards language-related challenges are related to expectations (Galloway et al. 2017), further highlighting the need for institutional-level needs analysis and clear aims, goals learning outcomes, staff training and quality assurance mechanisms.


**Fig. 2** Perceived benefits and challenges of EMI

## Conclusion

To date, while EMI is one of the most significant trends in higher education in the twenty-first century, there has been a focus on quantity over quality. This study highlights a wide range of environmental constraints to successful policy implementation. Globalisation, the global demand for English, and the global movement towards EMI in higher education are trends that are likely to continue. To implement EMI policy more effectively, more research is needed that includes the whole university community, as well as longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of teaching university subjects through the medium of English. Despite government targets and the role of EMI in university rankings and funding decisions, we need to divert the focus from quantity to quality, as opposed to implementing EMI in a haphazard way. We are not advocating indicators for best practice, however, as the approach taken should be context-sensitive. However, clear curriculum guidelines and quality assurance mechanisms are necessary. With the use of English as a global language and ever-increasing demands for English proficiency, growth in EMI provision is expected. EMI, at all levels of education, can have major educational, societal and economic consequences and, as such, we would argue that it is a topic of global relevance and one in need of further research.

**Acknowledgements** We thank The British Council for funding the larger study, Jarek Kruikow for his assistance with qualitative data analysis, colleagues in Japan and China for their assistance with data collection visits and the participants of the study.



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